



November 6, 2001

Ms. Jamie L. Johnson
Assistant Criminal District Attorney
County of Gregg
101 East Methvin Street, Suite 333
Longview, Texas 75601

OR2001-5126

Dear Ms. Johnson:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 154436.

The Gregg County Purchasing Office (the "county") received a request for a proposal or other material submitted by the law firm of Linebarger, Heard, Goggan, Blair, Graham, Pena, and Sampson, L.L.P. ("Linebarger") for the collection of outstanding fines and fees. You raise no exception on behalf of the county. However, you indicate that the request may implicate the proprietary rights of Linebarger. Consequently, you notified Linebarger of the request pursuant to section 552.305 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305 (permitting interested third party to submit to attorney general reasons why requested information should not be released); Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (determining that statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception in Public Information Act in certain circumstances).

We begin by noting that the submitted information indicates that Linebarger requested that the county maintain the submitted information as confidential. However, information subject to the Public Information Act is not confidential simply because the party submitting the information to the governmental body anticipates or requests that it be kept confidential, nor can a governmental body promise to keep information confidential absent statutory authorization. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 677 (Tex. 1976), *cert. denied* 430 U.S. 931 (1977).

As of the date of this letter, Linebarger has not submitted to this office any comments explaining why the submitted information should not be released. Therefore, we have no basis to conclude that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.110(b) (to prevent disclosure of commercial or financial information, party must

show by specific factual or evidentiary material, not conclusory or generalized allegations, that it actually faces competition and that substantial competitive injury would likely result from disclosure); Open Records Decision Nos. 552 at 5 (1990) (party must establish *prima facie* case that information is trade secret), 542 at 3 (1990). Thus, the county must release the submitted information to the requestor.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

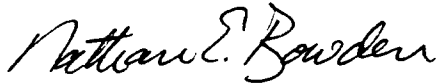
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Tex. Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the General Services Commission at 512/475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Nathan E. Bowden
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

NEB/sdk

Ref: ID# 154436

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Tab Beall
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